

CHOREOGRAPHING THE GAP

*Tallinn Designer's Square
Report*

Adrienne Woo Woon Cheong (6250408)

Supervisors: Klaske Havik, Pierre Jennen

Studio: A Matter of Scale, Methods of Analysis and Imagination

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Part I: Introduction

1.1 Prelude

The cobbled pavements drift into a rugged meander through the souvenir flooded streets of the Old Town. Bordering its edge, Viru Gate is confronted by the towering stature of the Viru hotel. Bodies swarm and disperse at the gaping intersection resting between them. Movements and sounds intertwine at a rhythmic pace, chatter giving way to traffic giving way to chatter. Soon the mall becomes the street. The body, seized by incandescent lights, yields to yet another aimless wandering inside glass cages. The street stretches with ever more glass veneers plastered onto the cold concrete of former Soviet structures.

My recollections and experiences in Tallinn are as such largely tinged by a struggle to attune to its many rhythms, accelerating at irregular intervals, yet the body seized by the tempo of the commodified.



Rivalling towers: Viru gates and Viru hotel (by author)



Neon-plastered walls in the old town (by author)

1.2 Problem Statement

Tallinn's fragmentary city-scape is composed of intersecting unfinished urban visions, an interplay between different socio-political layers through time. Despite this superimposition of multiple voices, the city centre appears uniform: clusters of high-intersection points between visions all lend themselves to homogenized environments of commerce and tourism. This is a strange occurrence, whereby one would expect much programmatic and social dissonance to emerge where competing visions converge. Instead, the city's negotiation of its postsocialist transformation with an embracing of neoliberal developments under a free market has smoothed over the city centre into a landscape dominated by consumption and exchange.

The limestone walls of the neglected old town are plastered with logos and neon signs, a radical commercialization of the historic facades. New developments increasingly favour larger footprints and extensive glass facades. Interspersed throughout these neoliberal developments, the remnants of the Soviet heritage are concealed behind new skins of transparency, revealing a tangible uncertainty surrounding engagement with this inherited past.

Rather than functioning as a site of collective urban life, the centre increasingly operates as a space optimized for economic exchange and tourism. Spaces for social transgression and difference are limited. With a floor area ratio of about 1.0 (City unfinished: urban visions of Tallinn 73), Tallinn's city centre lacks the density of residents, activities and social interactions necessary for the centre to flourish. It is notably deficient in programmed public spaces and pedestrian networks that encourage social encounters, moments of lingering and informal pauses.

The conducted contextual analysis has further revealed irregularities in the smoothed environment: pockets of underused public spaces that create gaps in the city centre. While gaps conventionally

suggest a certain subtraction or absence of material, in Tallinn they emerge between the material accumulation of temporal layers; strange, inactive spaces lodged between condensed nodes of homogeneous activity. Comprising residual buildings and neglected spaces, these gaps expose the fragility of Tallinn's city centre and remain susceptible to further sanitization and submergence by persistent commercial development.

spaces of emancipation and otherness.

Mark Pimlott's "Without and within" further expands on this condition, describing public spaces as "products of instrumental systems and their explicit and implicit programmes, embodying ideology and pragmatism". Through their containment and instrumentalization of social life, they have become sites of interiorization: public interiors. He explains that they "have assumed the characteristics of infrastructures, gathering and funnelling people, directing them with the cliches of publicity toward exchanges of consumption, to which the treaty between them has been narrowed" (Pimlott 12). Such interior spaces are forged through internalized logic that control movement and behaviour under the guise of "natural" spaces of flow. In their rejection of exteriority and otherness, these models of urban space have been exported across the globe, resembling each other and becoming increasingly detached from local conditions and needs.

In the "Production of Space", Henri Lefebvre refers to this homogeneity and fragmentation in our everyday lives as "abstract space". This space "erases distinctions, as much those which derive from nature and (historical) time as those which originate in the body (age, sex, ethnicity)". As the dominant spatial form centering wealth and power, it seeks to mold the spaces it dominates while reducing obstacles and resistance, often through force (Lefebvre 50). Materially, it implies the dissolution of historical and social richness in favor of an exchange value.

For Lefebvre, abstract space suppresses social space, which emerges in his dialectic framework: "conceived" space which are the abstract knowledge and ideologies about space that are utilized both by apparatuses of power to organize space; "perceived" space which deals with the daily routines and practices that constitute space, the everyday rhythms of walking, commuting, shopping and dwelling that collectively sustain and define urban space; and "lived" space which carries the personal and affective dimensions of spatial experience forged in the memory, emotions and imagination of the user. The third, "lived" space, exists within the



Soviet structure concealed by glass veneer (by author)

1.3 Relevance

The city centre of Tallinn presents a polished version of urbanity that is increasingly recurrent in architectural production across the world. In "Smooth City", Rene Boer questions this "urge for perfection, efficiency and control". According to him, it creates an odorless and frictionless environment that is clean, sterile and technologically mediated. While Boer acknowledges the importance of a safe, clean and well-functioning urban environment, he nevertheless challenges this obsession for perfection which stifles

tensions and contradictions between the conceived and the perceived. It sustains their friction while allowing difference to emerge from the tension: a creative interval, a potential for appropriation.

1.4 Objective and motivation

It is precisely in this creative interval that I position my architectural intervention. Rather than treating the identified gap as a site requiring sanitization and assimilation into the urban whole, I understand it instead as a potential site of rhythmic disruption and public reappropriation. The gap is currently held by unused and abandoned architectural spaces, offering an incision point through which to intervene in the city center and cultivate differential social space.

In order to do so, I turn towards the body not only as the subject and object of analysis and design but as the primary mode of spatial operation, transgression and appropriation. In continuation with the “Production of Space”, Lefebvre posits the body as the “frontier” of resistance against the instrumentalization of space. In contrast to the mechanized linear rhythms, the body offers the possibility of differentiation and uniqueness. It is the body that perceives and experiences space first through its sensory organs.

This thesis exploration can be seen as a reaction against the monophonic treatment of Tallinn’s layered urban histories, which stifles the emergence of social space. The project aims to re-establish meaningful lived spaces and social programs by operating within one of these gaps.

Its choreography begins with and through the body, adopting a phenomenological approach in the reimagination of the gap as a site of social encounter, occupation and appropriation rather than a mere passage. In reaction to the “erasure” of history by means of demolition and concealment, the thesis explores sensorial choreography to engender new forms of public engagement with those inherited structures and grapples with the material culture and charged architectural connotations of Tallinn’s Soviet past.

1.5 Research Questions

(Investing the gap and its borders)

1. How do overlapping urban visions (socio-political conceptions of scale) materialize at the phenomenological experience (individual perception of scale)? How do their spatial rhythms collide with bodily rhythm?
2. How do the rhythmic patterns emerging from those layered visions form a gap?

1.6 Design Questions

(Choreographing the gap and its constituents)

1. How can an architectural intervention disrupt the dominant linear rhythms of the city centre and enable the emergence of differential social rhythms?
2. How can the gap be reappropriated and choreographed as a space of collective urban life?

1.7 Site, scope and situation

The gap identified from the contextual analysis is delineated loosely by three tugging points - the medieval town, the shopping district and the Maakri business center - each invading and encroaching towards a homogenized whole. The site of intervention is found in this grey area and takes shape as a large underused courtyard island, its perimeter composed of soviet developments and bordered by the Estonia Avenue, Kaubamaja street, Rävala Avenue and Teatri Väljak.

With the exception of the Tallinn University Academic Library and the currently vacant Projekteerijate Maja building, the block consists primarily of residential buildings with commercial premises facing the streets. The courtyard itself is dominated by parking infrastructure, producing a barren and disconnected environment. The perimeter walls appear suspended between urban forces, awaiting assimilation into the surrounding commercialized city centre.

Current development proposals for the block largely reinforce this trajectory. Projekteerijate Maja, a former architects' house, is planned for demolition and replacement by a mixed-use commercial building. The adjacent Tallinn University Academic Library is expected to be preserved and expanded, while neighbouring buildings face similar redevelopment pressures, most of which are endeavored for further commercialization.

Oposing these plans, I view this isolated island as a potential for social regeneration within the city centre. Seeking to reduce the distance between conceived and lived space, the thesis will encourage for social appropriation in the public sphere on two levels: firstly the programmatic organisation of the courtyard with a focus on the reuse of the Projekteerijate Maja building and secondly on the phenomenological and lived experience of the public through, within and around the courtyard.

On the programmatic level, the project subverts the idea of the designer's "house" as the building was originally conceived - as an institutional and centralized entity - into a designer's "square" that

informalizes the design sphere and opens it up for public involvement. The program will create space for discussions and activities surrounding the built environment - particularly relevant in a context where the treatment of inherited architectural heritage remains uncertain.

The square acts as a condenser of public life, allowing activities, encounters and conflicts to spill and collide, uncontained by fixed programmatic boundaries. Squares are inherently multivocal spaces capable of accommodating various activities of the crowd, whether recreational, political or commercial (Wilkinson). Connected loosely by this unruly public square, the old Projekteerijate Maja will contain more focused programmatic nodes of making and learning spaces such as reuse workshops, arts and crafts, library space. On the ground floor, each making/learning program will be allocated corresponding space for public exchange; a market, an exhibition space, an auditorium and the square itself. The two towers will provide communal housing for resident artists, lecturers and students.

On the phenomenological level, the thesis will attempt to devise a research and design method grounded in bodily movement and multisensory perception. that rigorously builds from an understanding of how the body moves and perceives spaces. Through the layering and superimposition of sensory experiences, it seeks to choreograph an architectural intervention that emerges from the ways bodies encounter, navigate, and inhabit space.



Projekteerijate Maja (by author)

Part II: Approach

2.1 Theoretical framework

Phenomenology and Lived Space

This thesis adopts a multisensory investigation of space as a means of engaging with lived experience. In Henri Lefebvre's dialectical model, lived space encompasses the personal and affective dimensions of spatial experience that "overlay physical space, making symbolic use of its objects" (Lefebvre, 39). It emerges from the entanglement between perceived and conceived space, between the careful planning of bodies through space and the individual experiences that unfold within it.

Phenomenology offers a means of accessing this lived dimension. Taking from the Greek word "phainomai", phenomenology not only refers to the phenomena themselves, but to an active process as well of "making appear" (Avermaete 36). Within this framework, the body occupies a central role as both the subject of analysis and the medium through which space is experienced and produced.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty brings forward this act of making visible through the intermediary of the body, which he calls "embodied experience" (Avermaete 5). This introduces a multi sensorial engagement with space. In the "Poetics of Space", Gaston Bachelard navigates the texture of the embodied experience through poetic imagination. By entering what he calls a "topoanalysis" that is the "systemic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives" (30), he opens up the image to an emergent future.

Rhythmanalysis

Lefebvre proposes a method for entering lived space, through what he calls "rhythmanalysis". He spatializes rhythm and reveals its entrenchment in everyday life by opening it up to different discussions across music, the commodity, measurement, media, the city and political instruments that regulate daily life. His interest in the comparison of our natural, corporeal rhythms with mechanistic, machine rhythms of capitalist production positions the body as the point of contact between the coexistence of social and biological rhythms. In Lefebvre's

rhythmanalysis, the body emerges first as the subject of analysis but eventually evolves into the subject of change, a tool of productive capacity.

Urban Literacy

The thesis also turns to urban writing as a means of translating sensory experiences into spatial narratives and uncovering other aspects of lived experience such as atmosphere, mood or memory that are largely neglected in architectural discourse. In "Urban Literacy", Klaske Havik establishes literature as the bridge that sprouts out of the tension between existing architectural notions such as "subject-object, author-reader and reality-imagination" (23). She offers three paths that literature may pave along this bridge. Three "scriptive" concepts of "description, transcription and prescription" in which the space that emerges is embedded in "lived" space (ibid. 27).

Through this bridge, urban writing also mediates between reality and imagination and reveals the social aspects of architecture. It allows existing conditions to be documented while simultaneously opening them to alternative futures. In this sense, literature becomes a productive design tool rather than merely a descriptive one. As Havik notes, "in literature, the user appears twice, not only as a character whose activities unfold in time and space but also as a reader who, in a sense, co-produces the story by his or her own imagination" (24). Through the imagination of the writer, reader and user, urban literacy serves as a method for imagining new forms of occupation within the gap. It operates as a bridge between analysis and design, mediating between existing conditions and projected possibilities.

Phenomenology, rhythmanalysis and urban literacy establish a methodological foundation for the analytic and imaginative investigations developed throughout this thesis.

2.2 Methods of Analysis (entering conceived and perceived space)

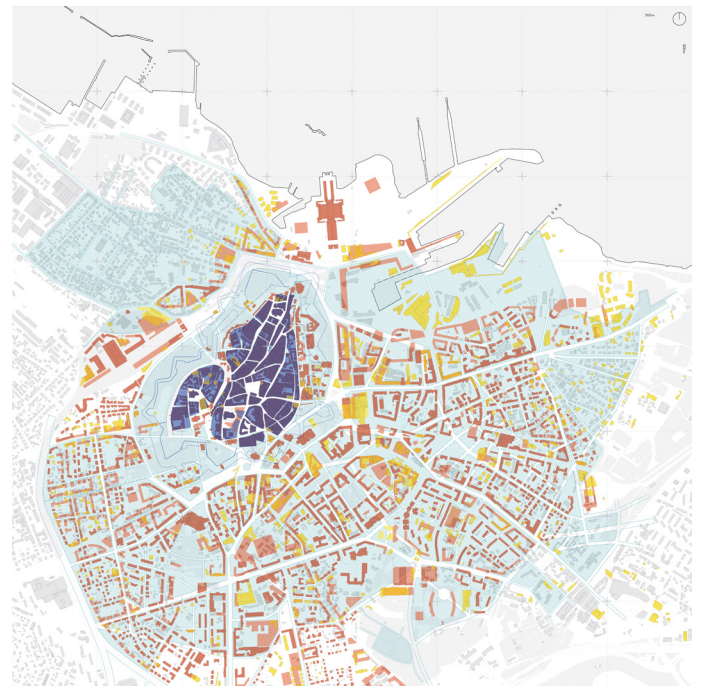
The methods of analysis focus on transcribing the collisions between bodily rhythms and socially produced ones and extracting the recurring patterns that emerge from these collisions.

Superimposing the conceived

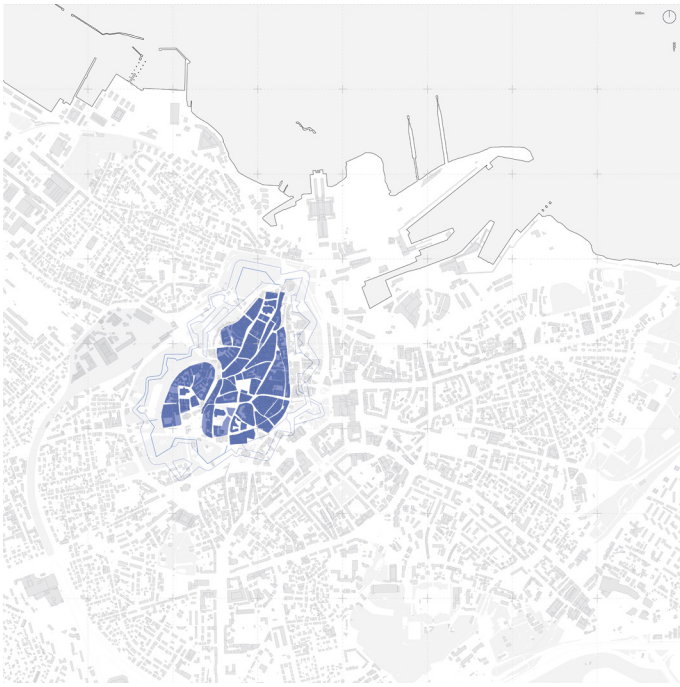
The contextual analysis first approaches Tallinn from a distance by investigating the systemic and conceived layers of its urban context. In order to understand how these accumulated unfinished visions of Tallinn have shaped the contemporary city, representational plans from different historical periods were superimposed in collaboration with Daniel Friedrich.

The analysis included the 1699 master plan of German-occupied Reval, Saarinen's 1913 Soviet masterplan for Tallinn, as well as post-independence developments encompassing buildings from 1990 to today. These city plans were then overlaid onto a contemporary figure-ground map of Tallinn.

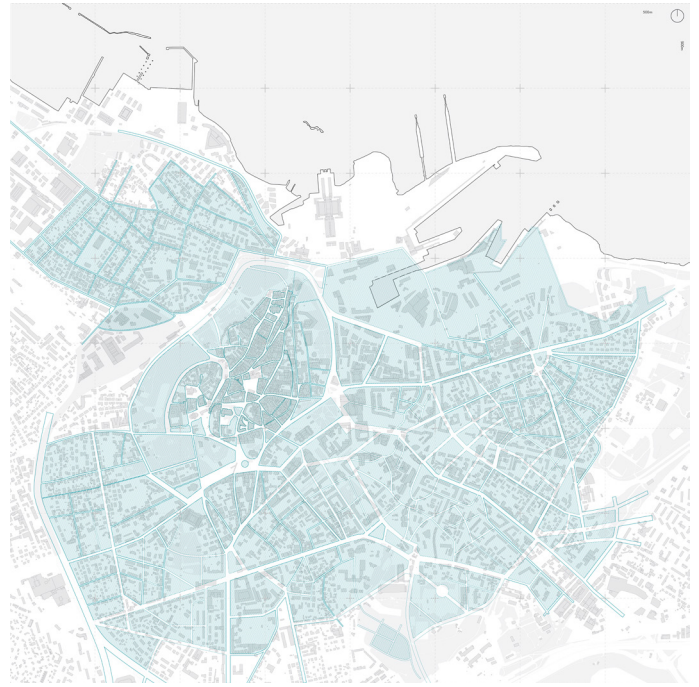
Although none of the plans are clear-cut categorization of developments into their specific visions, they reveal areas of ideological accumulation, intersection and clash as well as the extent to which past planning visions overlap within the current city. The resulting superimposed map reveals a high saturation of materialised visions within the current city centre bordering the Old Town. Such areas exhibit pronounced contrasts in architectural language, making them productive sites for further investigation.



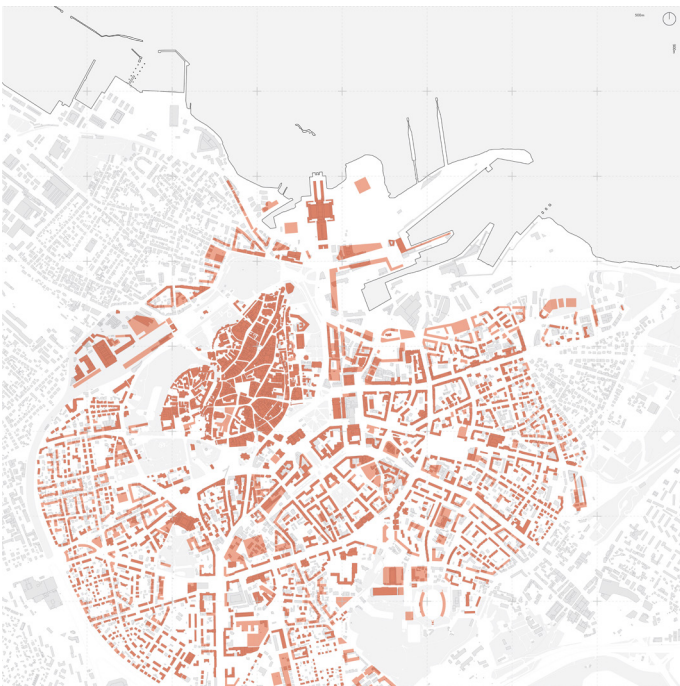
superimposed plans



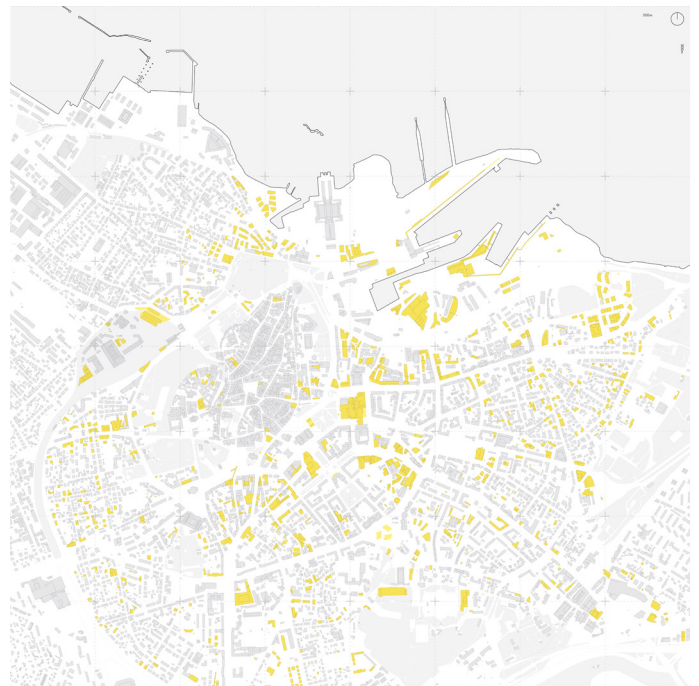
reval plan, 1699



suur-tallinn masterplan, 1913



second soviet masterplan, 1968



post-soviet developments, 1990-2025

Contextual analysis in collaboration with Daniel Friedrich

Rhythmanalysis of the perceived

To investigate the conditions that these clashing urban visions impose on our moving and sensing bodies, I followed with a closer phenomenological analysis of this zone of high saturation: The study focused on a section line radiating from the Old Town outward along Narva Road, and a second section cutting perpendicular to it and extending towards the Maakri tower district. Along these sections, I dissected different “scales” of perception.

Reflecting on my own perception of Tallinn during the field visit, I observed that the scales of the perceived (streets, facades, details etc.) were intricately linked with particular sensory modes. Accordingly, I dissected a rhythmanalysis of the street scape by assigning scale to movement, sight, sound and touch.

At the largest scale, movement, which served as the primary network through which all other senses were experienced, revealed rhythms of flow, circulation and bodily orientation with the city. Sight focused on the language of the facades and their relationship to public space. At a smaller scale yet, the soundscape provided insight into the density and distribution of activities, while touch revealed the material textures produced by the accumulation of intersecting urban visions through time.

This is not to suggest a strict mapping of scale onto specific modes of perception, nor that each mode can be extracted and analysed in isolation from each other. Rather, this analytic framework provides the possibility to transcribe patterns of rhythms in a way that makes the implications of linear rhythms on bodily rhythms legible and recognizable.

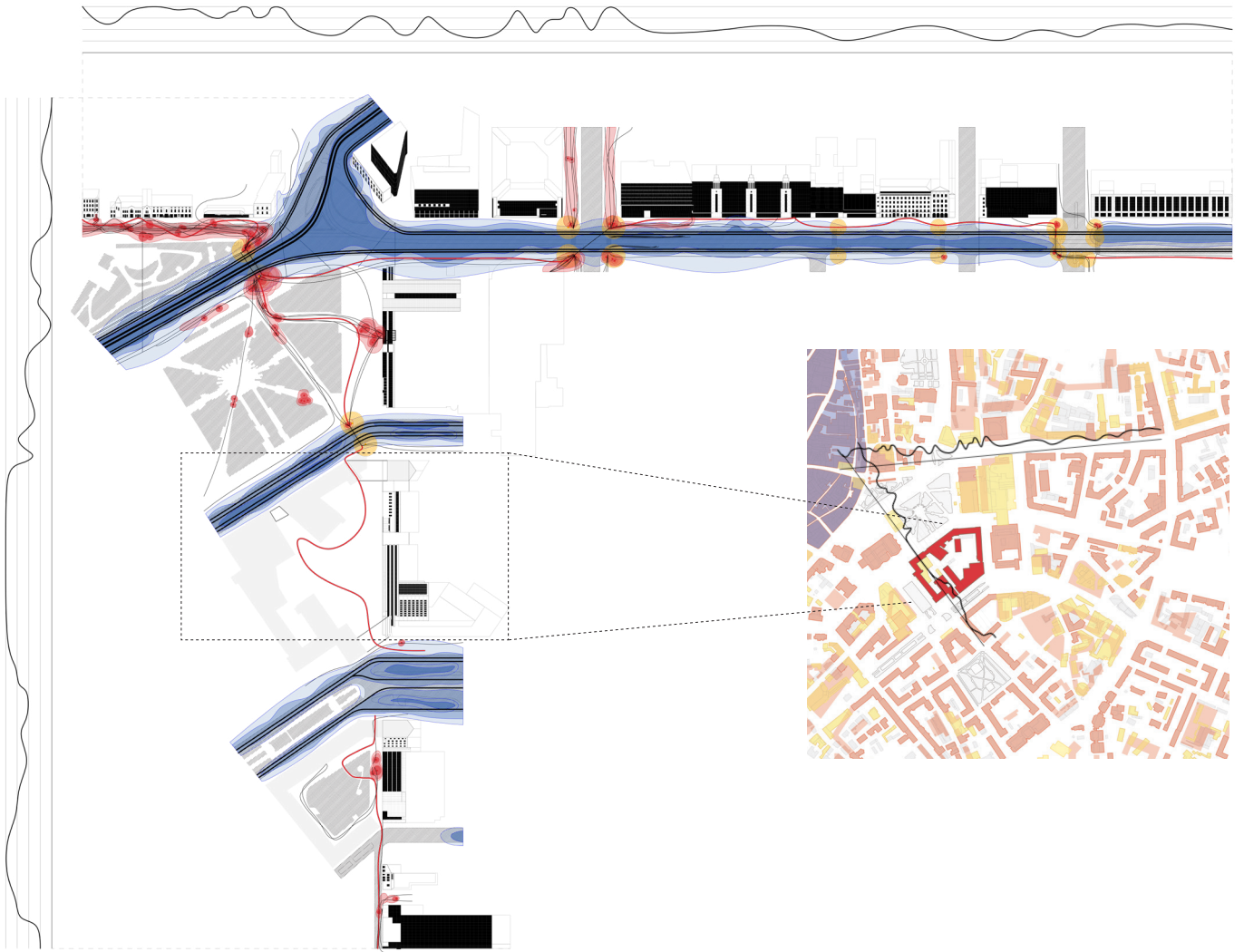
The phenomenological analysis revealed recurring spatial patterns corresponding to a language of consumerism, with each cluster of vision intersection revealing its own homogenized pattern. In the old town, meandering onto the cobbled stones turns nostalgia and the impression of pedestrian freedom into a tourist trap. Facades are punctuated by regular intervals of smaller windows whose displays quietly repeat the language of souvenirs and curated

nostalgia. Logos and signs appear frequently but carefully keep their distance from the limestone bricks they inhabit.

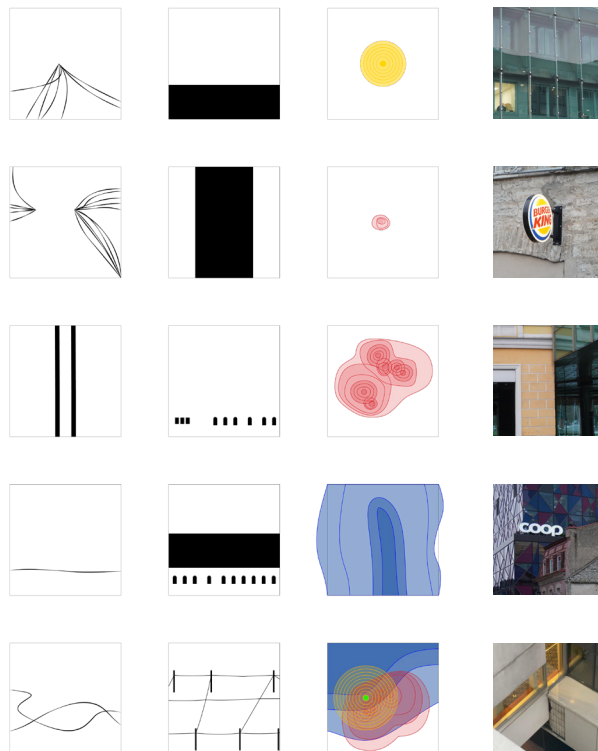
In the shopping district, pedestrians are drawn into elongated trajectories along continuous stretches of glass, mirroring the linear flow of vehicular traffic beside them, from which interiorized commercial spaces offer the primary points of refuge. Soviet structures are concealed beneath transparent skins that assume the appearance of the mall.

In the Maakri district, movements of people converge indefinitely into the towering office buildings and never seem to flow nor linger around. Their imposing verticality is intensified by the superimposition of these high-rise structures over the lower urban fabric. Although the architectural contrast is dramatic, the rhythms of occupation remain remarkably monotonous.

However, along the sectional line, this continuity is interrupted by the sudden emergence of a gap. Pedestrian rhythms suddenly dissipate and all buildings within the courtyard fall barren and silent. This arrhythmia in the city centre provides the site for an urban choreography.



Phenomenological analysis



Catalogue of patterns

2.3 Methods of Imagination (Encountering lived space)

The methods of imagination attempt to reappropriate the analyzed homogenized patterns of Tallinn's city centre and those imposed by the existing Projektiraate Maja into a new choreography that allows for the production of social space. Based on the theoretical framework, the choreography arises from a multilayered superimposition of sensory-driven imagination tools.

Rhythmanalysis

Following the broader phenomenological analysis, I investigated the existing conditions of the site itself. Movement patterns through and around the courtyard were mapped to understand its relationship with the surrounding urban fabric.

Visual observations and archival material were used to analyze the building's existing facade conditions and structural composition, examining how they shape first encounters with the site and influence the permeability of sound and social activity within the city centre. These investigations revealed opportunities for intervention and informed strategies for activating the courtyard as a social space.



Existing situation

Sensorial transcription

The sensorial transcription combines Havik's scriptive modes of description, transcription and prescription to mediate between different sensory perception as well as the tension between conceived and lived space.

Through this exercise, I constructed narrative sequences following a resident, a secondary-school student and a university student as they inhabited the proposed Designer's Square. Mapping their experiences onto the site revealed programmatic opportunities, sensory relationships and sequential temporal patterns of occupation that informed the design proposal.



Sensorial transcription

Case studies

The programmatic intervention of the designer square was also inspired by the following case studies, each entering the sphere of social space:

1. Share and Reuse Factory, Belgium (Atama)
2. Oodi Helsinki Central Library, Finland (ALA Architects)

The spatial and architectural language of adaptive reuse are further explored through the analysis of the following case studies:

1. Thoravej 29, Copenhagen (Pihlmann architects)
2. Charleroi Palais des Expositions, Belgium (Jan de Vlyder)

Part III: Results

3.1 Initial design explorations

In the initial design explorations, I began by carving out movement patterns identified during the phenomenological analysis onto the site of intervention in an attempt to reappropriate them and inscribe them with a new language of social production. Mapping out these different rhythms of movements on site gave way to broad schematic moves.

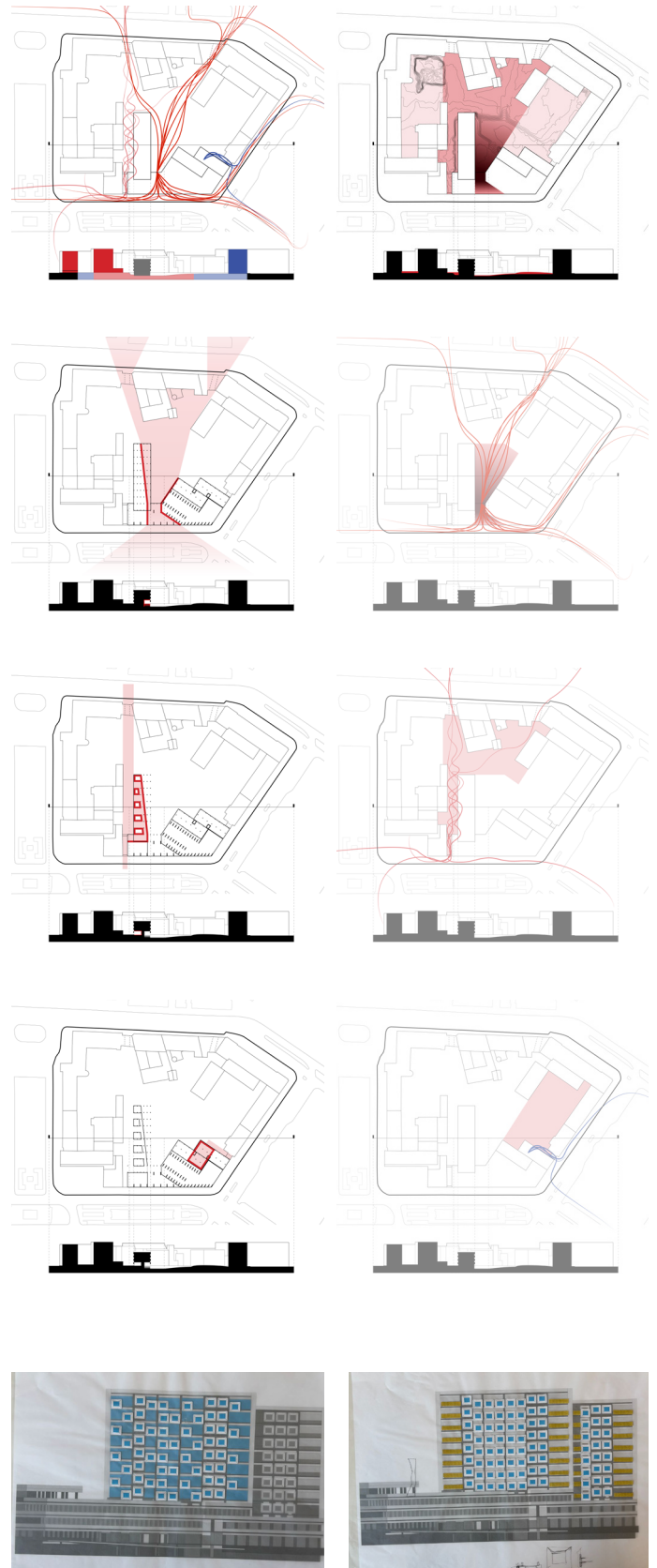
Special consideration was given to existing entrances and topographical conditions: The site's natural descent towards the courtyard was amplified and transformed into a zone of social condensation, providing a spatial distinction between public and private zones while reinforcing the courtyard's role as a collective centre.

Through collage, I explored strategies for increasing the permeability of the existing facades and enabling forms of intrusion into the building.

Working primarily through plan drawings, I investigated ways of dissecting the existing structure and separating its constituent parts. Analysis of the structural framework revealed opportunities to compartmentalize certain activities and acoustic conditions while allowing others to proliferate throughout the social core of the project.

Due to the inaccessibility of the building during the field visit, archival photographs became an essential tool for understanding its material composition. Existing elements were catalogued as a material bank and evaluated for reuse.

Through this process, the project began to explore ways of revealing, transforming and reactivating the textures and histories embedded within the existing structure.



Initial design explorations

3.2 Final Design

Rather than adding, the project engages with the existing heritage through revelation by subtraction: Across the different architectural scales at which the senses engage space, new encounters with existing conditions are forged in processes of reinterpretation.

At the largest scale of movement the design invites four passageways through the existing entrances to the courtyard into the social core; each extending the surrounding pedestrian network. The procession into the courtyard is guided by amplifying the site's existing topography and the structural logic of the existing buildings. Along the main Rõvala avenue, the building opens itself to public occupation; it provides a grand entrance into the primary zone of social condensation, funneling visitors towards the public square at the centre of the courtyard.

On the opposite side, the entrances bordering Tammsaare Park reinterpret the meandering and linear movement patterns identified in the contextual analysis and translate them into paths leading towards the social square. The meandering route is accentuated by a moat that frames the entrance and guides visitors through a playful descent into the courtyard. In contrast, a linear passage is created by activating an underused storage building, whose floor slab is exposed to the extending sloping terrain. Along Kaubamaja street, a private entrance accommodates the movement of residents while maintaining a connection to the social core.

With these strategies for carving out a social landscape, differentiating public and private zones, established, I turned to sight as a means of shaping first encounters with the building's thresholds. Here, the design operates in counterpoint to the elongated horizontal and vertical glass surfaces of Tallinn's shopping and office districts, where facades often function as barriers rather than mediators between public and interior life. This strategy culminates in the selective removal of facade elements at public entrances, allowing the ground floor to remain

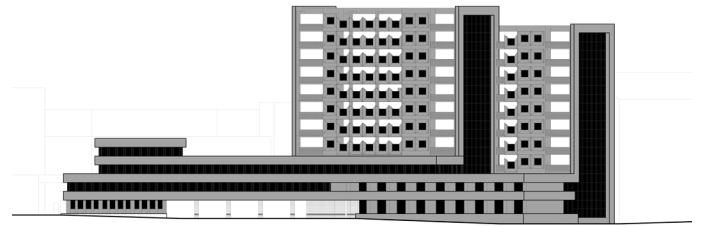
continuous between exterior and interior space and extending the street into the courtyard. Within the residential zones, a more nuanced approach is adopted. While maintaining the broader objective of dissolving barriers, the facades of the residential towers are recessed to create loggia spaces that mediate between public and private life. By opening and softening the building envelope, the project challenges the language of the continuous horizontals and verticals of the existing building and of those that characterize the malls and office towers of the city centre.

Throughout the design process, sound became a tool for organizing activities and understanding how different programs might proliferate, overlap or remain contained within the building. Unlike the consumer-oriented rhythms observed in Tallinn's city centre, where activity is often mediated through commercial exchange and vehicular traffic, the project uses social interaction as the binding agent between the various programs.

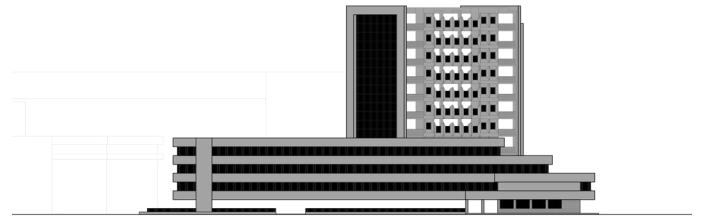
As such, the ground floor functions as a permeable social landscape where sounds can condense, disperse and intersect freely. It accommodates most public programs of exchange and gathering, including the market, cafe, multipurpose staircase hall and exhibition space. This social ground extends vertically through a series of atria that simultaneously separate and connect the makerspace, library, art laboratory and residential towers. Operable openings overlooking the social square allow sounds and activities to permeate between program boundaries, creating moments of interaction while preserving degrees of autonomy.

Finally, at the tactile scale, the project investigates how existing building elements can be transformed into new forms of engagement. In contrast to the processes of concealment observed during the contextual analysis - where soviet structures are frequently masked behind glass facades - the intervention reveals the building's accumulated history and reactivates those existing material

textures through new use. The state of ruin is therefore not understood as a condition awaiting correction, but as an architectural potential for generating new social and spatial relationships. Former window frames are repurposed as railings, bringing the body into close tactile contact with the building through leaning, grasping and support. Existing brick and tiled surfaces are reconfigured as flooring and stair elements, while rubble from removed components is reused as gabion retaining wall seats. Through these acts of material transformation, the project encourages direct engagement with the inherited fabric of the building and imagines new ways of negotiating with the historical layers embedded within its original construction.



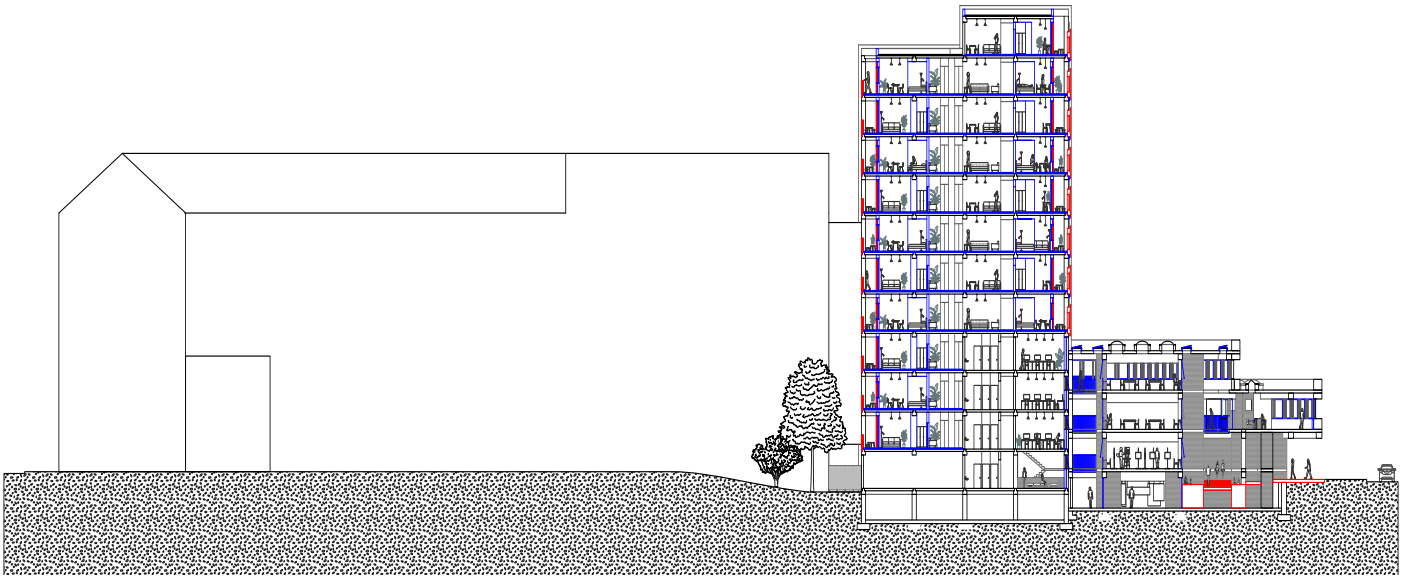
Elevation view



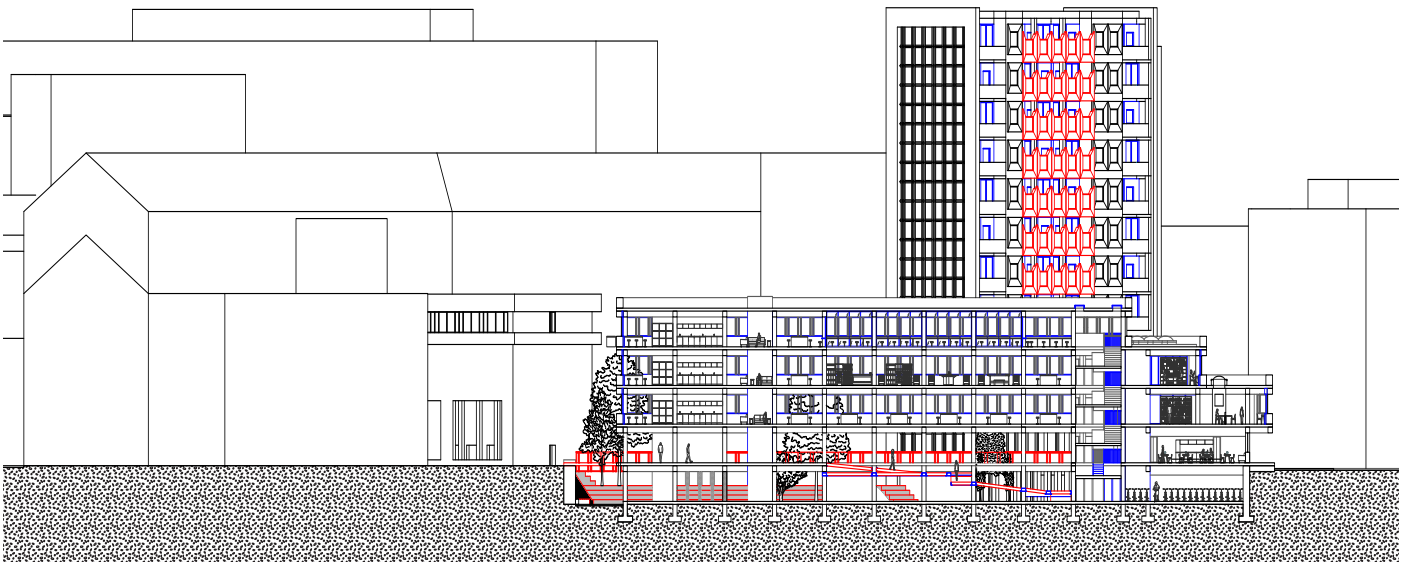
Elevation view



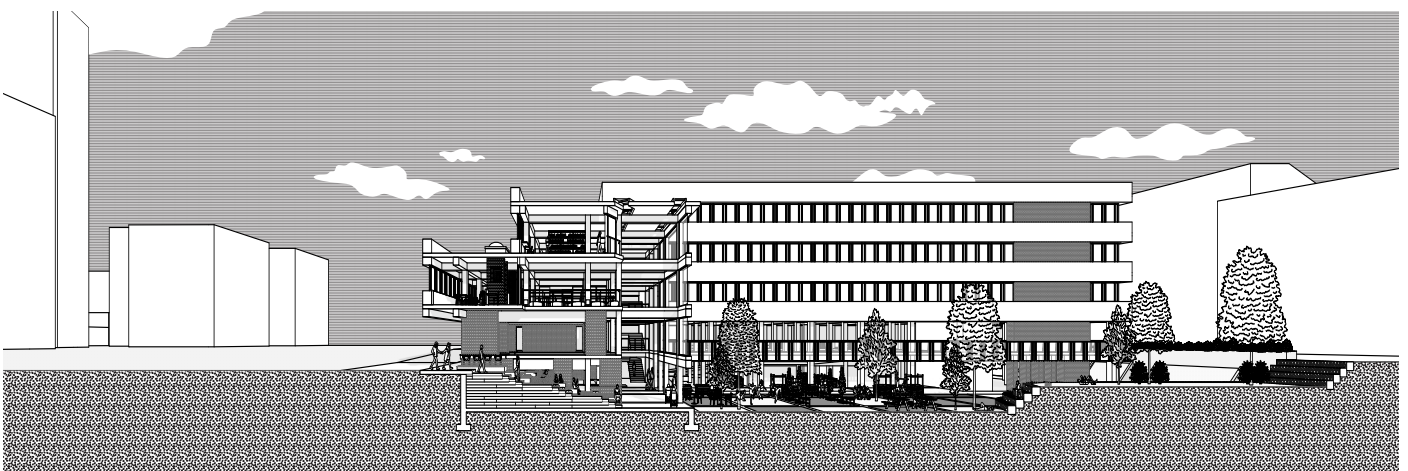
Ground floor plan



Dwelling - art lab section



Maker's lab - library section



Designer square section

Part IV: Conclusion and Discussion

4.1 Conclusion

This thesis set out to investigate how architectural intervention on an existing heritage might operate within lived space by means of sensorial choreography. Through the identification and reappropriation of a gap within Tallinn's city centre, the project explored how architecture can resist homogenizing urban rhythms and foster conditions for social space to emerge.

The final design engages with the existing soviet heritage through acts of revelation by subtraction rather than addition. Across multiple sensorial scales, the intervention uncovers latent spatial qualities embedded within the existing structure. Rather than relying on extensive new construction, the project works primarily through removal, exposure, and transformation. New elements are introduced only where necessary to ensure safety, accessibility and climate performance, such as railings, insulation and enclosure systems. In this sense, the intervention does not seek to restore the building to a pristine or completed state. Instead, it embraces the existing structure in its condition of partial ruin, allowing traces of weathering, decay and incompleteness to remain visible. The project treats these conditions not as deficiencies to be concealed but as opportunities for new forms of engagement. By preserving the building's openness to interpretation and encounter, the intervention foregrounds its material history while creating a framework through which contemporary uses can emerge. Architecture here operates less as an act of replacement and more as a process of making visible and inhabiting what already exists.

Through this process of uncovering, the former Projekteerijate Maja is transformed from a closed, inaccessible, and deteriorating structure into a social condenser capable of supporting collective urban life. Spaces concealed beneath successive layers of modification are revealed and reactivated, generating new opportunities for occupation, encounter and appropriation.

The project directly addresses the conditions

identified in the introduction. In response to Tallinn's increasingly homogenized city centre, it seeks to cultivate spaces of difference and social interaction. By working attentively at the scale of bodily perception and sensory experience, the intervention attempts to counter the dominance of commercialized urban environments and create conditions for alternative rhythms to emerge.

Furthermore, the project responds to Tallinn's need for density and social space within the city centre. Rather than contributing to the continued expansion of shopping and office programmes, it concentrates activities, learning environments, housing, and public facilities within an existing urban gap. In doing so, it reimagines density not simply as a quantitative measure of development but as a qualitative concentration of social life.

Finally, the project embraces the arrhythmia of the gap rather than attempting to erase it. What initially appeared as an absence within the city centre becomes a productive interruption in the dominant urban rhythm. Through architectural choreography, the project amplified this discontinuity and transforms it into a place of lingering, encounter and collective occupation from which alternative forms of urban life may emerge.

4.2 Implications and Recommendations

Beyond the specific context of Tallinn, this thesis contributes to ongoing discussions surrounding adaptive reuse, heritage and the future role of existing architecture within urban centres.

The project approaches adaptive reuse not as an act of preservation alone, but as a method of imagination and transformation through sensorial reappropriation. Rather than treating heritage as a static object to be conserved, it understands existing buildings as active participants in contemporary urban life. Through careful acts of reinterpretation and reappropriation, historical layers are opened to new forms of use and meaning. In this way, the project negotiates between continuity and change

without erasing either.

This position directly challenges the notion of “construction-as-salvation” that continues to dominate much architectural production (Alkemade et al., 62). Faced with social, economic, and environmental challenges, architecture often defaults to new construction as the primary mode of intervention. This thesis argues instead that meaningful transformation can emerge through working with what already exists. Existing buildings should not be viewed merely as constraints on design but as reservoirs of spatial, cultural, and material potential.

In addition to the environmental benefits associated with retaining existing building stock, the project explores how adaptive reuse can engage with politically and culturally charged heritage. This is particularly relevant in Tallinn, where modernist and Soviet-era architecture remains entangled with memories of occupation and political trauma (Lige). Demolition may remove the physical presence of these buildings, but it does not erase the histories they embody.

Rather than advocating either preservation or erasure, the thesis proposes a third position: one of continued engagement. Through sensorial reappropriation, existing heritage can be brought into new forms of dialogue with contemporary society. New encounters with familiar materials, spaces, and structures allow inherited buildings to acquire renewed relevance while retaining traces of their past.

In the broader context of climate change, resource scarcity, and declining city centres, this approach suggests an alternative model for urban regeneration. Vacant and underused buildings represent significant opportunities for both environmental sustainability and social revitalization. Their transformation can contribute not only to reducing material waste and embodied carbon but also to strengthening collective urban life.

4.3 Reflection

The methodological framework developed throughout this thesis combined phenomenology, rhythm analysis, and urban literacy as complementary ways of encountering, interpreting, and imagining space.

Particularly valuable was the use of rhythm analysis from Lefebvre and of sensorial transcription, which drew upon Havik’s scriptive modes of description, transcription, and prescription. While the former gave way to a structure method of analysing different architectural elements based on each sense, the latter allowed movement, sight, sound and touch to overlap and inform one another, both revealing experiential dimensions of the architectural space. Whereas the rhythm analysis relied upon systematic observation, writing allowed for a more open-ended exploration of atmosphere, memory, anticipation, and occupation. Together, they formed the backbone of a rigorous approach to analysis and imagination.

At the same time, the process revealed several limitations and opportunities for further development. While movement, sight, sound, and touch were used as analytical lenses, certain senses received more attention than others. Sound, for example, remained largely conceptual and organizational, rather than being explored through acoustic simulations, recordings, or sound-based representations. Similarly, tactile investigations could have benefited from a more detailed examination of material textures, weathering, and bodily interaction with specific surfaces.

The methodology also relied upon assigning particular senses to particular architectural scales. While this proved useful as an analytical framework, it occasionally risked oversimplifying the complexity of sensory experience. Future explorations could investigate how each sense operates across all scales of architecture simultaneously, considering movement, sight, sound, and touch at the scale of the urban territory, the facade, the room, and the

detail alike.

A further reflection concerns the relationship between conceived and lived space. Although the project attempts to create conditions for appropriation, it remains impossible to fully predict how people will ultimately inhabit and transform a building. The tension between design intention and lived experience remains unresolved and perhaps should remain so.

This tension became particularly apparent in the design of circulation routes and spatial sequences. The project proposes pathways and choreographies intended to guide movement into the courtyard and through the building. Yet architecture must remain open to uses beyond those anticipated by the designer. While the project seeks to encourage certain forms of encounter and occupation, it should not determine them completely. The success of social space ultimately depends upon its capacity to accommodate unforeseen behaviours, interpretations, and appropriations.

Finally, the thesis demonstrates how theoretical frameworks such as phenomenology, rhythm analysis, and urban literacy can be translated into project-specific design methodologies. Rather than remaining abstract conceptual tools, these theories became operative instruments through which the site was analysed, interpreted, and transformed. Their combination enabled a design process that moved continuously between bodily experience, urban observation, narrative imagination, and architectural intervention.

Overall the thesis approaches architecture through lived experience, engages critically with existing conditions, and remains open to the multiple futures that emerge through occupation and use.

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